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7. — *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life. With a Complete Bibliography of the Subject.* By WILLIAM ROUNSEVILLE ALGER. — *Literature of the Doctrine of a Future Life : or, A Catalogue of Works relating to the Nature, Origin, and Destiny of the Soul. The Titles classified, and arranged chronologically, with Notes and Indexes of Authors and Subjects.* By EZRA ABBOT. Forming an Appendix to the History of the Doctrine of a Future Life, by William R. Alger. Philadelphia : George W. Childs. 1864. 8vo. pp. 914.

PERHAPS so comprehensive a book as this on the subject to which it relates had never been written before. We know of none which at once covers so much ground and includes such a number and diversity of details. It should and could have been only a long labor ; and though Mr. Alger is still a young man, it is due to him to say that his mind was strongly drawn toward this field of inquiry at an early period of his novitiate, and that his studies have had this prevailing direction from the very first, so that we have here the condensed thought and research of nearly twenty years, — the specific plan of this book having been held in view for more than half that time. And we have abundant evidence that these years have been spent with unusual diligence and with a concentration of purpose rare in one who bears at the same time the charge of constant professional duty. The author has sought access, wherever it was in his power, to original sources of knowledge ; and when these were in languages in which he could not consult them, he has had recourse seldom to merely popular works, but almost always to writers confessedly of the highest authority. Copious references in the foot-notes and quotations in the text amply attest his fidelity in investigation ; and though we have not attempted the verification of this part of the work, we are confident that it has been performed with conscientious impartiality and accuracy.

The First Part, entitled “Historical and Critical Introductory Views,” contains a general outline of the theories that have been maintained as to the origin and destiny of the soul, the significance of death, and the nature of the future life. Part Second — “Ethnic Thoughts concerning a Future Life” — is a history of the various forms which the life beyond death has assumed in the belief and mythology of all non-Christian nations, including the Hebrews, whose place is rather, as seems to us, in juxtaposition with Christians than among “the Gentiles” ; for orthodoxy and latitudinarianism alike place the Hebrew and the Christian religion in the relation of source and fountain, or of germ and fruit, or of part and whole. The Third Part — “New Testament

Teachings concerning a Future Life" — gives a detailed analysis of the distinctive characteristics in this regard of the several portions of the sacred canon respectively, and of the discourses of Jesus Christ, together with a summary of what the author deems the essential doctrines of Christianity on the subject in hand. The Fourth Part — "Christian Thoughts concerning a Future Life" — is a synopsis of the patristic, mediæval, and modern doctrines as to things beyond death and beyond this world. Part Fifth — "Historical and Critical Dissertations concerning a Future Life" — discusses several secondary phases of belief and minor dogmas — modes of or corollaries from the doctrine of immortality — which had not found an appropriate place in the preceding portions of the work.

The Second Part, while it demanded more labor, profounder study, and larger knowledge than all the rest of the book, is by far the best portion, and indicates the author's superior capacity of learned research, — at once of shaping inquiries and of ascertaining where and how they may best be answered. The Fourth Part, covering a large portion and comprehending a most important chapter of Christian history, deserves similar praise. Indeed, what merits great commendation throughout the entire volume is the writer's evident purpose to produce and compile, for the benefit of his readers, whatever lay within his reach that could have any important bearing on his subject. Thus, though his work is not in form and method precisely a "history," but rather a series of historical, critical, and dogmatic essays, it contains very ample materials for a systematic history.

In our last sentence we have intimated what may be deemed a fault. The book is not what it professes to be, — not less indeed, but more, yet other than its title promises. It lacks symmetry and unity. Still further, it has not the homogeneousness of style and manner which is expected in what purports to be a connected work. We are inclined to think that the author either shaped his materials as they came to his hand, or gathered them as he could put them to some immediate use, writing now a sermon, now a lecture, now an essay for a review, meanwhile ever and anon a chapter of the contemplated work; and that these various kinds of composition have been here brought together with very little change.

There is, in the parts of the volume which refer to modern states of opinion, an air of antagonism which hardly suits the dignity of history. And we feel by no means sure that the author is not sometimes hacking with stout arm and valorous intent at the prostrate forms of theological monsters slain ages ago. We think that those whom he professes to oppose would hardly recognize their own dogmas in his representations

of them. There is, withal, in these doctrinal discussions, we will not say a bitterness, for it is perfectly clear that the book is written in a kindly temper, but a matter-of-course, *ex cathedra* statement of certain views as self-evident in the light of reason, and of the opposite views as palpably absurd or ridiculous, — in fine, a tone which has struck us unpleasantly even when we entirely agreed in opinion with the author.

With this sharp assertion on matters at issue among the established sects of Christendom, we cannot but contrast a somewhat vague deliverance as to points in discussion between the advocates of historical Christianity on the one hand, and the various divisions of the naturalistic school on the other. Here the balance of the author's reasoning preponderates on the side of orthodoxy; but pains are taken to heap all the little weights that can be found to bring the other scale as nearly as possible to a counterpoise. This fancy is carried so far, that the book, consecrated as it is to the illustration and confirmation of "the hope full of immortality," closes with a labored, and, we must say, in our apprehension an utterly heathenish, attempt to demonstrate the comparative insignificance of that hope in its bearing on human character and happiness.

Mr. Alger's narrative and historical style is clear, sufficiently concise, and well suited to his subject. But in the rhetorical portions of his book, (and we include the argumentative parts, which are highly rhetorical,) there is a frequent turgidness, and we sometimes find a sentence which we cannot understand even on the third or fourth reading.

These criticisms we make in simple justice to our readers; but in spite of its defects, Mr. Alger's book is a work highly creditable to his ability, industry, learning, and perseverance, and adapted to be of great service alike to members of his own profession and to the more thoughtful and inquiring portion of the larger public.

Mr. Abbot's Appendix ought to be a volume by itself. We do not use the word *perfect* in its ordinary American sense of *imperfect*, when we speak of this work as perfect in its kind. In form, method, and execution it could not be better, and as to its completeness one cannot read Mr. Abbot's Preface, and see how many and various were the catalogues and bibliographical works which he consulted, without feeling sure that no book important enough to deserve commemoration has been overlooked, while even review articles and pamphlet essays are not suffered to pass without record.

The classification of this Catalogue is logical and exhaustive. The Nature, Origin, and Destiny of the Soul furnish respectively the designation of the three classes which form the primary division. Under the Second Class we have two Sections, the first comprising "Compre-

hensive Works," and the second works on the Pre-Existence of the Soul. The three Sections of the Third Class comprise respectively "Comprehensive Works on the Immortality of the Soul and the Future Life"; works on the "Doctrine concerning the Soul and the Future Life among Nations and Sects not Christian"; and works on the "Doctrine of the Soul and the Future Life in Christian Theology." Under the second of these Sections there are five subdivisions of the first, sixteen of the second, and six of the third order; under the third, six subdivisions of the first, seventeen of the second, and four of the third order. An Appendix follows on "Modern Spiritualism, or Spiritism, Ghosts, etc."; and another on the "Nature, Origin, and Destiny of the Souls of Brutes." The whole number of works and editions thus catalogued is but little short of five thousand, without reckoning reviews of specific works, which are named and described in notes appended to their respective titles.

Under each of these numerous divisions, the titles are arranged in chronological order. Each title is given in full, with a specification of the shape, number of pages, publishers, and place of publication of the work. Still more, whenever the rareness or importance of the book renders it desirable, a concise note is added to the title, containing a compend of its critical history, an estimate of its value, and often a summary of its contents. These notes are so numerous, rich, and full, as to make the catalogue singularly attractive to the reader, and the amount, not of mere book-statistics, but of curious and precious learning and of keen and searching comment, comprised in these pages, would alone secure for them a foremost place among standard works in the department of bibliography. An Index of Authors, Pseudonymes, and Anonymous Works, and an Index of Subjects, complete this monograph, and render it as easy of use as it is thorough, comprehensive, and systematic.

No description that can be given of Mr. Abbot's work is adequate to its merits. We doubt whether within the same space there has ever been a digest of more ripe learning, knowledge, and wisdom. It only meets the expectations of those readers who know its author; it must be a surprise to the greater number to whom he would have been earlier known had not his modesty exceeded his merits.